

*House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Schedules October 1 Hearing*

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands will hold the first ever congressional hearing on America's Red Rock Wilderness Act -- a bill Hinchey has introduced for the past 15 years to preserve 9.4 million acres of Utah's spectacular red rock country as wilderness. The subcommittee, led by Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), will hold its hearing on October 1.

"This hearing will provide us with an opportunity to more fully discuss the many important reasons why Congress should pass America's Red Rock Wilderness Act," Hinchey said. "I'm very grateful to full Committee Chairman Rahall and Subcommittee Chairman Grijalva for scheduling this hearing and providing us with a forum to detail the need to protect these 9.4 million acres in their wilderness state for this and all future generations of Americans. This part of our country is some of the most remarkably pristine and beautiful land in the world and this bill would ensure that it stays that way forever."

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act would ensure that 9.4 million acres of wilderness in southern Utah remain in their natural state, and strictly prohibit mining, road and dam construction, off-road vehicle use, and other activities that would destroy the area's special character. Non-consumptive uses such as hunting, fishing, camping, backpacking, hiking, and horseback riding would continue to be permitted and grazing rights existing at the time of any wilderness designation would also be unaffected. Currently, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) owns the 9.4 million acres, but the agency is not prohibited from selling part of the land for development or developing parts itself.

In 1989, Utah Congressman Wayne Owens introduced the original version of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. After Owens retired he asked Hinchey to introduce the legislation, which the congressman began doing in 1994. U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) did the same beginning in 1997. Hinchey and Durbin reintroduced the bipartisan America's Red Rock Wilderness Act in April 2009. The bill now has 136 cosponsors in the House and 21 in the Senate.

The bill is based on an extensive survey conducted by volunteers from the Utah Wilderness

Coalition (UWC). This public inventory, called the "UWC Citizen's Proposal," found that the BLM had overlooked or ignored vast areas of wild country in the agency's original inventory. As additional inventory work has been conducted for the Citizen's Proposal, the America's Red Rock Wilderness Act has been updated to reflect the latest findings. The current version of the bill proposes protections for roughly 9.4 million acres of BLM public land in Utah.

The publicly owned wild places of Utah are world-renowned for their spectacular beauty with deep, narrow red rock canyons, fantastic sandstone arches, tremendous open vistas, and wild rivers. Currently, only 1.1 percent of Utah's BLM public lands are protected as wilderness. Nowhere else in the lower 48 states can such intact wilderness-quality lands be found. These areas are a haven for outdoor recreationists, backpackers, hikers, and wildlife enthusiasts. The red rock area is also rich with archeological remnants of prehistoric cultures.

The measure is endorsed by the Utah Wilderness Coalition, including the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Sierra Club, Earthjustice, Natural Resources Defense Council, The Wilderness Society, and over 200 member organizations of the Utah Wilderness Coalition, representing millions of Utahans and Americans alike.